

THE JAPANESE IN CALIFORNIA.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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The American Association for International Conciliation has received a letter from a gentleman living in Santa Barbara, Cal., who takes up in some detail the question of the anti-Japanese legislation in California. He gives the point of view of those who sympathize with the action of the California Legislature and feel that an "entire misconception of the problem" exists in the East. It is a pleasure to have his clear exposition of California's side of the matter. Nevertheless, most of us will probably feel that certain aspects of the question have been overlooked and that perhaps there is in California an entire misconception of the "Eastern" attitude—the attitude of those who consider the Anti-Alien Land Law too drastic and sweeping a measure.

In the first place, there is no desire in the East to ride roughshod over what we "are pleased to consider the mere blind race prejudice of California." We realize that California has a problem to face, and that in some ways it is its own peculiar problem. But when the solution offered is one which involves the possible alienation of a foreign nation, which risks friendly relations with a people notably sensitive and patriotic, the problem becomes national and the policy of California becomes the policy of the whole country. The State cannot impose an action of international sig-

nificance upon the United States and be irritated at "interference" from the other parts of the Union.

The writer of the letter argues that "amalgamation of our race with the Japanese, to the extent and within the limit of time necessary to make a large influx of Japanese desirable or permissible," is impossible. He is speaking of what Dr. Gulick has called biological as opposed to sociological assimilation. Now there is no question but that Japanese do assimilate in the sense that they become industrious, law-abiding, upright members of the State. It is a well-known fact that the Japanese are the most persistent of all immigrants in learning English and that they are eager to educate their children. It is acknowledged that they develop our uncultivated lands and that their labor is valuable to the community. Most Californians—including the writer of the letter in question—admit their respect for the Japanese. The question of assimilation, then, reduces itself to a question of the possibility and advisability of intermarriage. Considerable experience would seem to prove that such intermarriage has been in many cases both permissible and desirable. At any rate such a question can surely be handled by special investigation and legislation. To pass sweeping laws denying to a certain race or nation the privileges they have hitherto cherished is to overshoot the mark. Or to change the metaphor—it is better to try to heal the wound before proceeding to amputate.

But the writer argues further. "It is generally admitted," he says, "that a large part of our social and political difficulties in America arise from the mixture of heterogeneous nationalities. There is never

the same feeling of solidarity and interdependence in a mixed population, nor the same race or national family pride and honor to be upheld that are found in countries where the population is substantially homogeneous." He compares the European peoples with our own and finds that the former exhibit more distinct national characteristics. Nevertheless, in spite of the mixture of races in America, we seem to preserve a remarkable amount of solidarity and national pride. If certain distinct national characteristics are not so evident in this country as in Europe, it is rather on account of its area and its strongly developed sectional interests than on account of its mixed population. The theory that different races exhibit distinct and unchangeable psychological traits is now pretty thoroughly discredited by modern sociologists. Environment works wonders. No one has any doubt as to the complete social assimilation in America of the descendants of all immigrants from Europe of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Irish, the Germans, the Swedes have become active citizens playing an important part in the conduct of our Government and in the development of our resources. Peoples of other nationalities, if not so perfectly assimilated, have done necessary work which in many cases Americans will not do. The Japanese, for instance, cultivate the low-lying districts along the Sacramento River—districts tabooed by the native American population. Without them this whole fertile district would probably be idle and useless. It has been said that the Japanese produce about 50 per cent. of the total results of agriculture in California. They certainly produce 90 per

cent. of the berry crop. The Japanese farmer is a sober, hard-working, intelligent member of the community. He is not driving out the white man but supplementing his work and specializing in certain forms of industry. We cannot be jealous of an industry so useful to us; and as a matter of fact the white farmers of California are not nearly so jealous of the Japanese as interested politicians may represent. We cannot, in our zeal to make the country more homogeneous, proceed to eliminate one race of people and continue to welcome others.

The trouble is that while to California this matter appears a question for California alone, to the Japanese it means a national issue with the United States. The writer of the letter illustrates this point well. He supposes a case of two neighbors, one of whom, with a larger tract of land and a smaller family, allows his neighbors some use of his property. When they begin to abuse the privilege, overrun his land and claim the "right" to use it, he naturally objects. If the neighbor appeals to municipal authority, "the larger owner will protest against any attempt of the city government to enforce continued or enlarged hospitality." The case bears little analogy to the Japan-California question. Japan and California are not on equal footing as two states or two nations. The illustration would be more correct if we supposed that only one member of a family felt aggrieved by his neighbors' aggression and ordered them all from the premises, even though such action on his part was not approved or supported by his own kin. Surely strained relations would arise between the two houses and the family

would feel itself responsible for its son's presumption. There is no getting away from the fact that we are dealing with a matter of international significance. California is not proceeding against a group of poor settlers within her borders. When she legislates she must look not only to the matter but to the spirit of her legislation, and to the manner in which it is enunciated. In fact this particular question is rather more one of manner than matter. For California is dealing with a foreign nation whose citizens are progressive, enlightened people. She risks arousing the animosity of that nation, not toward herself, but toward the government at Washington. Japan cannot feel that discriminative action against her citizens is a matter for one State to settle. Any answer, any retaliation, must be to the national Government itself. The question is an affair of nations.

Lastly, the writer says, Californians object to being crowded out of their country. They want to reserve their spare ground for their fellow-countrymen and for other immigrants "who can and will quickly assimilate with our own people, rather than have it occupied by an essentially alien and unassimilable race, who may eventually dispute our possession, and contend for their own ideas in the government and in society." He believes the Japanese are building up a formidable organization for the peaceful conquest of the country by mere force of numbers and are establishing colonies with a view to peaceful occupation. "We insist upon our right to keep the country for America and Americans, actual and prospective."

The situation would seem more appalling if it were

not for the fact that between 1909 and 1912, after the new restrictions upon Japanese immigration had been imposed, the excess of departures over arrivals was 6,664. The proportion of Japanese to other inhabitants of California is only 1 to 45, and the danger of our being "swamped" by Japanese has been much exaggerated. Japan has shown herself ready to restrict her immigration to our shores, and would undoubtedly coöperate with the United States in introducing further surveillance. As Mr. Hamilton Holt said, the danger is not worth risking amicable relations with a foreign government. It is a noble thing to want to keep the country for America and Americans, but it cannot be done by discriminating among the nations who come to our shores. Let California's patriotism extend a little farther. Let her consult with America and the Americans before she represents them unfairly and plunges the country into international difficulties. She will find that the nation is ready and willing to coöperate with her.